

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
April 13, 2009
7:10 P.M.**

MAYOR JEFFREY E. GRAHAM PRESIDING

PRESENT: COUNCIL MEMBER ROXANNE M. BURNS
 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH M. BUTLER, JR.
 COUNCIL MEMBER PETER L. CLOUGH
 MAYOR GRAHAM

ALSO PRESENT: CITY MANAGER MARY M. CORRIVEAU

ABSENT: COUNCIL MEMBER JEFFREY M. SMITH

Police Department 2008 Annual Report

Report was presented to Council.

Firing Range Accident

Chief Goss explained that they have ordered two gun vices. These vices have a remote trigger system which will not require officers to be in close proximity to the weapon being fired. They are hoping to receive them within 10 days. Chief Goss also reported that Officer Trapp was working today.

Bi-annual Shut Off of Delinquent Water/Sewer Accounts

Gary Pilon, Water Superintendent, explained that every spring and fall there are usually about the same number of shut offs, with many of them being the same accounts. As of today, there were 512 accounts scheduled for shutoff. He explained that normally at the close of business on the last day there are about 200 outstanding accounts.

2008 Annual Drinking Water Report

Report was presented to Council.

Sales Tax Revenue Update

Mrs. Corriveau reviewed the numbers with Council explaining that the modified budget number for Sales Tax is \$14,248,138, which is approximately 9.5% less than originally adopted. Based on the modified Sales Tax projection, collections through March are up 2.3% or \$248,980.

Fee Review

Citibus:

Mrs. Corriveau remarked that a lot of time and energy was put into this review by Assistant to the City Manager Bryan White with assistance from City Comptroller James Mills and input from department heads. She explained that these proposed increases are not in the proposed budget that will be released next week. Any changes Council makes will have a positive impact on that budget.

Council Member Clough commented that we've accused New York State of adding fees onto the tax payers and this looks like we are doing the same thing.

Council Member Burns remarked that while she agrees with Council Member Clough, the fact is that many of these fees have not been looked at for 15 years. In the case of Citibus, transportation costs have increased.

Kathy Webster, Transit Supervisor, explained the fare structures and the economy books. She also mentioned that it hasn't been 15 years since these fees have been looked at. They are looked at on a regular basis. However, no action has been taken on changing them for 15 years.

Mr. White explained that these proposed fees were arrived at after completing a comprehensive survey of other municipalities in the state.

Mayor Graham asked what percentage the fees were for the total operating cost.

Mrs. Corriveau responded that 15-20% come from users of the system. 40-45% of the funds come from state and federal programs and the remainder comes from the general fund.

Council Member Butler suggested that the economy books remain the same price. He commented that the people buying the books are the most vulnerable. He asked why the senior fare was increased for the books.

Ms. Webster explained that printing costs have gone up dramatically. She also commented that it would cut down on printing costs if the individuals would use the Medicare cards and paid the 50¢.

Council Member Clough remarked that these proposals would be increased revenue of about \$29,000. He commented that Citibus is also looking at expansion of the routes and purchasing buses.

Mayor Graham commented that the rate structure should be more reflective of the value of the service provided. He remarked that these fees are well below the true cost of the service.

Council Member Butler reiterated his concern with the increase in the economy books. He remarked that the printing of the books should be done in house. He questioned why someone in the IT Dept. couldn't do this.

Mayor Graham commented that to say that only the seniors and handicapped are financially challenged is not correct as there are other individuals who don't fall into those categories that are also challenged.

Ms. Webster remarked that the proposed fee increases do not reflect the actual costs of the service, as it is the service that is important.

City Clerk:

Mrs. Dutton explained that the wedding ceremony program was started in 2002. At that time, NYS had recently raised the marriage license fee to \$40 from \$25. She stressed the importance of not pricing ourselves out of the business. Since many of the justices charge around \$50, she felt that this would be a reasonable increase. In addition, couples married at City Hall receive their legal documents immediately following the ceremony.

Mayor Graham responded that many of the civil ceremonies are very plain. Whereas, the ones done in the Clerk's office are much nicer. In addition, the office offers them the gazebo or the wedding room for the ceremony. He suggested that the fee be increased to at least \$60 and possibly more.

Mrs. Dutton asked that she have the opportunity to have it set at \$50 for a year and see what happens as a result of the increase.

Council Members Burns and Butler expressed their agreement to set it at \$50.

Mayor Graham responded that when any of these fees being discussed this evening come up for a vote, Council members may motion to amend the amounts at that time.

City Comptroller:

Mayor Graham remarked that he feels that parking tickets are somewhat predatory and he didn't care if any tickets were issued.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that parking tickets are issued in an attempt to correct behavior.

Council Member Clough asked how many tickets are issued by the parking enforcement person versus police officers.

Mr. Mills explained that of 1,253 tickets issued through the end of March, 592 were written by parking enforcement. He also explained that the collection rate is between high 70% to low 80%. He commented that he is considering bringing collection in-house.

Mayor Graham asked about having the names of the chronic offenders be made public.

Mr. Mills said that he didn't think that could be done.

Mayor Graham remarked that he respectively disagreed with Mr. Mills as the individuals have been in violation of a law and therefore, names can be made public.
Mr. White commented that people laugh at the present \$15.00 fee.

Council Member Burns remarked that raising the fees is a logical progression.

Engineering:

Mr. Hauk explained that the proposed fees are based on the establishment of the average time spent on each and the cost incurred.

Council Member Burns remarked that she was a little surprised that the City didn't charge for subdivision permits before.

Council Member Butler commented that the City would be short changed on the big projects and over charging on the small ones if the site plan fees were the same for any size project.

After much discussion, Mrs. Corriveau commented that staff can look at a step program for the site plan fees.

Council concurred.

Fire:

Mayor Graham asked if the malfunctioning alarms should be addressed through the Codes Dept.

Council Member Burns remarked that she would not support an ordinance that would discourage anyone from calling the fire or police for assistance. She commented that offenders should be dealt with on an individual basis.

Council Member Butler stated that he supported the ordinance due to the fact that these repeat false alarms are a misuse of resources.

Mr. White explained that these are avoidable alarms, some caused by technical malfunctions others caused by someone pulling an alarm as a joke.

Mayor Graham remarked that would be a criminal act.

Chief Goss advised that in the past, Watertown High School, Samaritan Medical Center and the entire Price Chopper Plaza have had repeat false police alarms. He explained that they way the police handled it was to meet with each place and to make them aware of what was creating the false alarms. Each has taken actions to correct the situation.

Parks & Recreation:

Discussion was held concerning market rates and what costs the City actually incurs to have events at the arena. A listing of events for 2008 was given to Council. The listing contained the actual costs incurred by the City for each event. Costs ranged from \$800 for the Senior Fair to \$7,925 for the Italian Festival.

Council Member Clough commented about these costs and if the decision is made to charge these costs, the events should be notified ahead of time. He also asked about taking the money out of the bed tax account.

Council Member Butler commented that we should be charging more for night games.

Mr. St. Croix responded that he would rather see Council institute a light fee.

Mayor Graham and Council Member Butler agreed that the tennis and golf programs should be left alone.

Mrs. Corriveau responded that there are costs associated with these programs.

Discussion was held concerning charging if specialty staff such as union electricians have to be brought in.

Mayor Graham remarked that we need to work toward a system where the City is reimbursed for extraordinary expenses.

Council agreed that there has to be more discussion on this as it is not ready for an ordinance.

Public Works:

DPW Superintendent Eugene Hayes answered questions posed by Council concerning these proposed fees.

Council agreed that they did not want a \$500 parade permit fee imposed. They also asked that the sewer inspection fee be changed to read “actual cost with a minimum of \$100”.

Water:

Council reviewed the proposed fees. They agreed with the top portion which included Water Service Restoration fee, water line maintenance permit and water line installation permit. They did not agree with the middle section concerning connection fees. Council agreed with the main-to-curb sections of the report and asked to have an ordinance prepared for those specific portions.

Training Opportunity

Report was presented to Council.

Water Bill Survey Status

Council Member Butler asked about this.

Mr. Mills said that out of 4,300 bills, the ACH survey had 300 yes responses, about double for the no responses. The credit card survey was about the same with 350 yes and 650 no.

Council Member Butler asked what the status was for instituting the use of credit cards.

Mr. Mills explained that he was waiting for the survey responses.

Work session ended at 9:42 p.m.

Donna M. Dutton

City Clerk